



**For Immediate Release**

**April 14, 2006**

**Albanian Center for International Trade Holds Conference to Discuss the  
Stabilization Association Agreement**

TIRANË– The Albanian Center for International Trade (ACIT), as a joint program of USAID and the Institute for Contemporary Studies, held a conference today to discuss implications of the recently initialed Stabilization Association Agreement (SAA) for Albanian businesses. Albanian business people, representatives from ministries, agencies and business supporting organizations, as well as Members of the Parliament, attended the conference. The Minister of Economy, Trade, and Energy, Mr. Genc Ruli, the Head of the Economic, Political, and Press Section of the EC delegation Mr. Carlo Natale, USAID Mission Director Mr. Harry Birnholz, and the Deputy Minister of European Integration, Mr. Albert Gajo, addressed participants.

The aim of the conference was to improve understanding and awareness about the commitments and responsibilities deriving from Albania's SAA signing and integration process with the European Union. The half-day conference focused on the trade liberalization process, the new trade regime, the competitiveness of the Albanian economy, as well as the challenges and opportunities for the Albanian agriculture and food processing industry, in the face of the interim SAA.

"The motivation for bringing this topic to the public's attention now is threefold," explained Dr. Selim Belortaja, ACIT's Executive Director, "The trade regime will be the first part of the SAA which will enter into effect immediately after the SAA signature; there is still very little awareness about the content, challenges and responsibilities that Albania must be ready to accept and act on once the agreement is signed; and among the business community, farmers, and other groups, there seems to be some disbelief and wariness about the impact of this process."

The Albanian Center for International Trade was launched in 2003. Its main goal is the improvement of trade policies in Albania, as an important instrument for the economic growth and development of the country, as well as the benefits to the public from the opportunities created by the trade liberalization and integration process. Last year, ACIT organized a series of seminars to discuss the harmonization of the Albania-EU trade regime with the current liberalization processes of the World Trade Organization and Free Trade Agreements, the quality of trade information necessary for efficient negotiations, and the patterns and pace of trade liberalization with the EU.

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